

Crimes of fashion

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

You wait two years for Eugene Jarvis's Narc to be ported to home computers, and then within the space of a couple of months, *two* interpretations come along at once. One the official conversion by Ocean, and the other a blatant rip-off courtesy of Access Software, published by US Gold. Also in 1990, Code Monkeys subsequently spread the joy by porting their DOS game to the Amiga. Ironically the credits include an entry for 'original concept'... dedicated to StarBuck, Bryan Brandenburg, and Bruce Johnson.



If you've ever wondered what Arnie Schwarzenegger might look like after facial reconstruction you only have to take a glance at Crime Wave's cover art. The Spanish release anyway... where no-one would possibly notice the resemblance (to the True Lies artwork) because that's practically another solar system.

There's no Arnie movie by the same name so don't expect to find a licensed blockbuster adaptation contained within. In fact, the game's hero - 'super crime fighter' Lucas McCabe - looks totally different in the game, matching the box artwork of the other regional releases. Except for the snazzy Elvis attire with which we're issued upon pushing the start button. Uh-huh, thank you mam... is the opening sound effect I would have snuck in. Had Luke not been assigned with such a deadly-serious world-saving mission that would be sacrilegious to contemplate mocking.

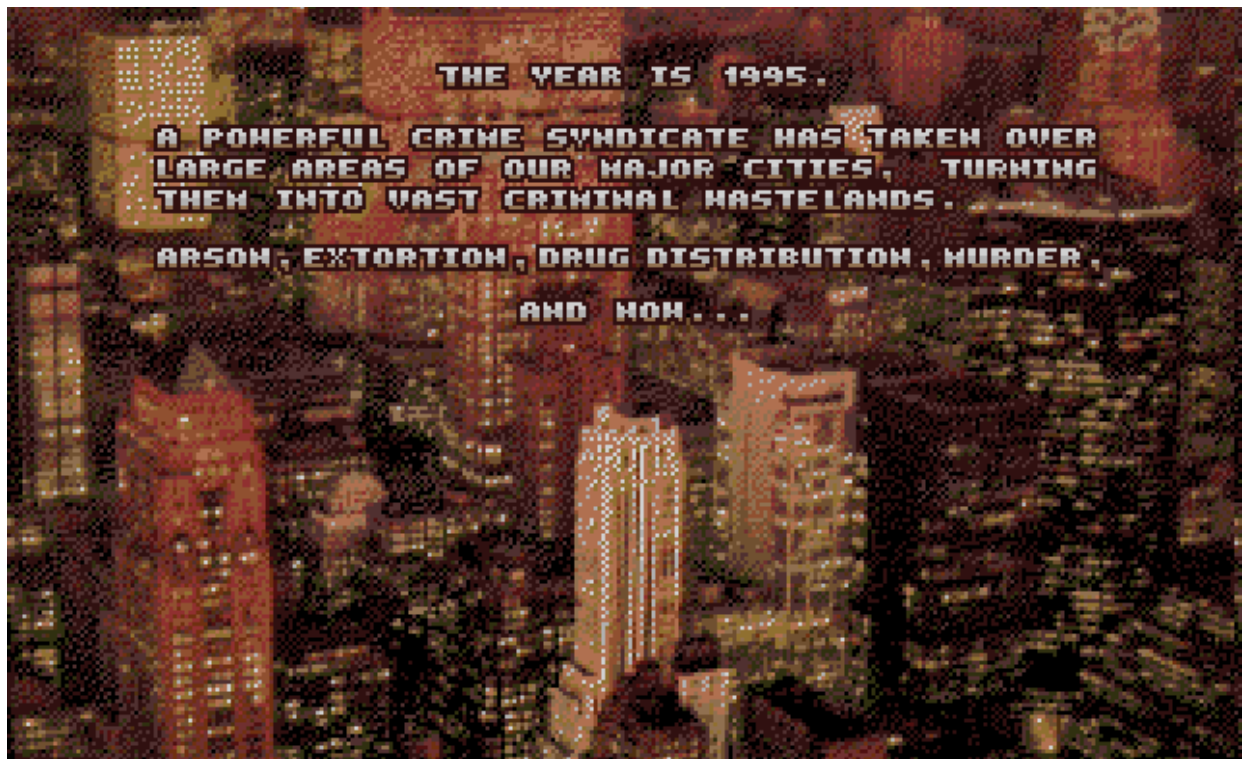
Instead, the UK and US releases depict a completely different obligatory damsel in distress to the one we're drafted in to rescue; president's daughter, Brittany Cole.

As if it matters, 'King Pin', the leader of a generic criminal syndicate imaginatively known as MOB, is behind the kidnapping. Obviously the goal is to hold daddy to ransom until he concedes to his demands, which later it transpires entail overthrowing New York's leadership so he can step into the breach. Just one state? Why not...

dramatic booming voice

...*The World?*

Pfft, amateurs! No ambition some people.



Part B of King Pin's treacherous scheme involves printing his own money and dishing out free drugs to the populace to ensure they are so doped up they won't care who is in the

hot-seat, or put up any resistance. *Opiate* is the opiate of the masses? Maybe Karl Marx was over-complicating the situation then.

And so commences the '80s cheesefest complete with title music ripped from a very short segment of Pink Floyd's 'One Slip', pulsating, fluorescent disco floors, and cookie-cutter plot.

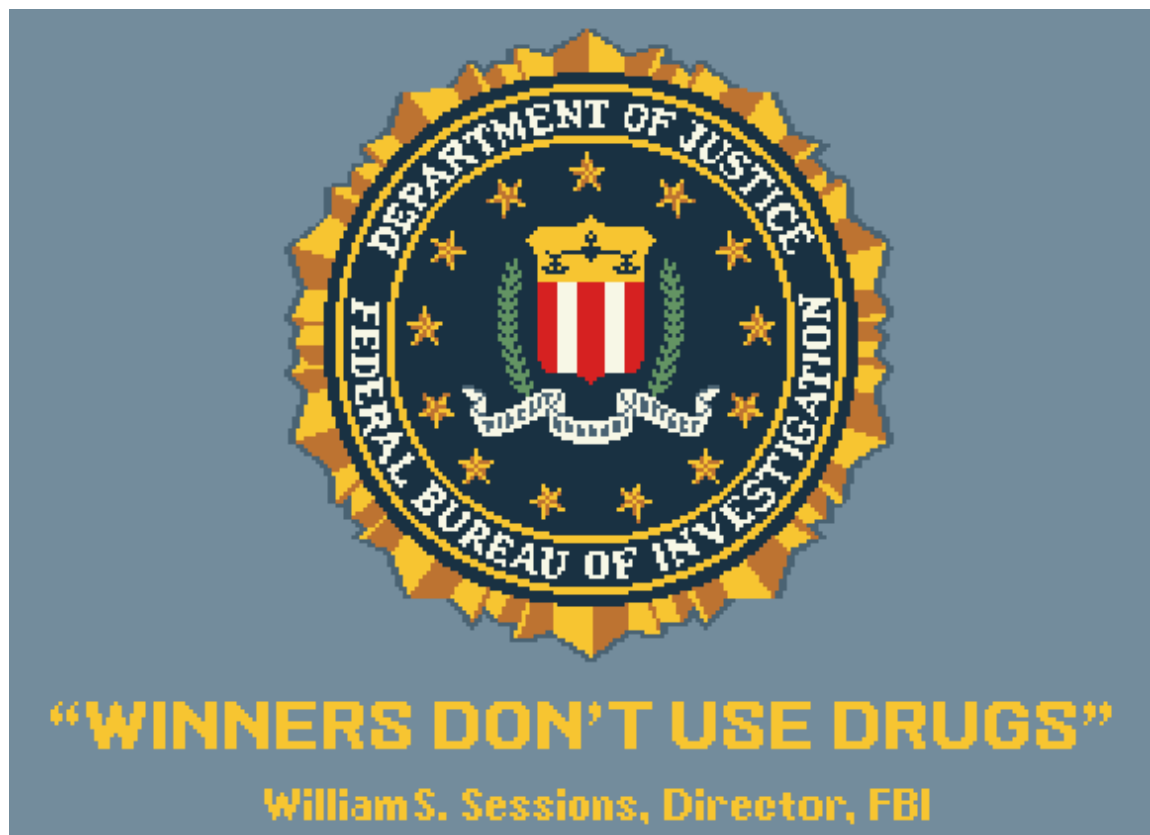


To be able to track down Brittany, naturally Luke will need to establish her measurements and other biographical particulars by interrogating the inter-agency computer. Low and behold up pops a (presumably) topless picture, for reasons that... erm, uhh...



Now infinitely better equipped to face the challenge ahead we set off blasting anything that moves with rockets and a machine gun. Scenery such as barrels and crates can also be laid to waste, revealing extra ammo, lives, energy or a protective shield.

Similarly, these top-ups can be collected from within bonus rooms, along with cash and drugs. Just for score-boosting purposes, you understand. Winners - of course - *don't* do drugs. I'm not so sure about stealing cash. Did FBI director, William S. Sessions, ever comment on that?



Ploughing through the wreckage there's a varying core group of goofballs to annihilate, all sporting totally believable, mega-intimidating names. 'Crack Mack and his pals' and 'Tiny and his crew', for instance.

Then there's the de rigueur Mafiosa-sounding Eddie Moscone, who we're informed is a 'three-time loser'. That's a bit mean, isn't it? Labelling can really hurt people's feelings.

Of course, there's also a ninja clan with which to contend. This is the '90s after all, or is it the '80s? The game can't seem to make up its mind one way or the other. I don't suppose it matters - the ninja craze bridged both decades like a spinning tornado kick time warp, sucking every conceivable entertainment medium into its necromantic vortex.

What use is a beat 'em up game without ninjas? And surely it wouldn't be a Narc rip-off if you weren't twice as likely to complete the game by spending the entirety of the journey milking the auto-fire button and crouching down to swerve a hail of bullets, whilst shuffling along at the speed of a snail suffering from advanced stage foot rot.



Interesting, yet not something unique to Crime Wave, the sprites and interstitial scenes are comprised of 256 colour "incredible digitalised 'Motion Graphics' featuring real actors and models", rather than traditional pixel art. Still, impressive for a home computer release.

Odd then after so much effort went into transposing realistic movement to animated pixels that the game's copyright protection mechanism is so flimsy.

To boot the game we're required to enter keywords from the manual to prove a genuine copy has been purchased. A

standard approach with obvious drawbacks of course. Nevertheless, where Access really shot themselves in the foot is failing to encrypt the Assembly code used to write the main executable file. Edit this in a basic text editor and the (limited number of) magic words are available in plain sight. They can even be changed or removed entirely so that skipping the copyright check becomes possible.

It would be interesting to find out if this actually *helped* sales rather than hindered them; it's feasible that the crackers would leave well alone knowing there was no glory in breaking the games 'protection'. Perhaps it was illegally distributed regardless, simply left intact.



Another seducement at the time was the digitised 'Real Sound (TM)' that allowed the game to utilise a PC's built-in speakers to produce improved music and speech fidelity compared to the usual bleeps and blips early DOS games were 'blessed' with. That is without the addition of a

dedicated hardware soundcard, which in the early '90s many PCs didn't come equipped with.

Wrestling with limitations wasn't unique to boring-beige-box gaming either. Many of us, emerging from an Amiga background, growing up playing Atari ST ports, we'd come to expect games to be blighted by ridiculously oversized HUDs. Crime Wave is no different, except curiously, Access - the team who designed the inaugural DOS release - at least tried to build it into the story-line. Here we are led to believe we're being monitored by King Pin's cronies via closed-circuit TV, and our view is contrived by looking over their shoulders. We're a fly on the wall of their observation control room, watching them, watching us. It's almost reminiscent of Jareth the Goblin King supervising his Labyrinth via a crystal ball.



It's a shame the compensations made in terms of playfield real estate aren't reflected in the game's performance or the responsiveness of the controls. It still suffers from a fair bit of

lagginess whenever there's plenty of activity on-screen, while the controls are thoroughly broken and stiff regardless. Dematerialising the baddies when exterminated to clear them from the battlefield doesn't seem to do much to alleviate this.

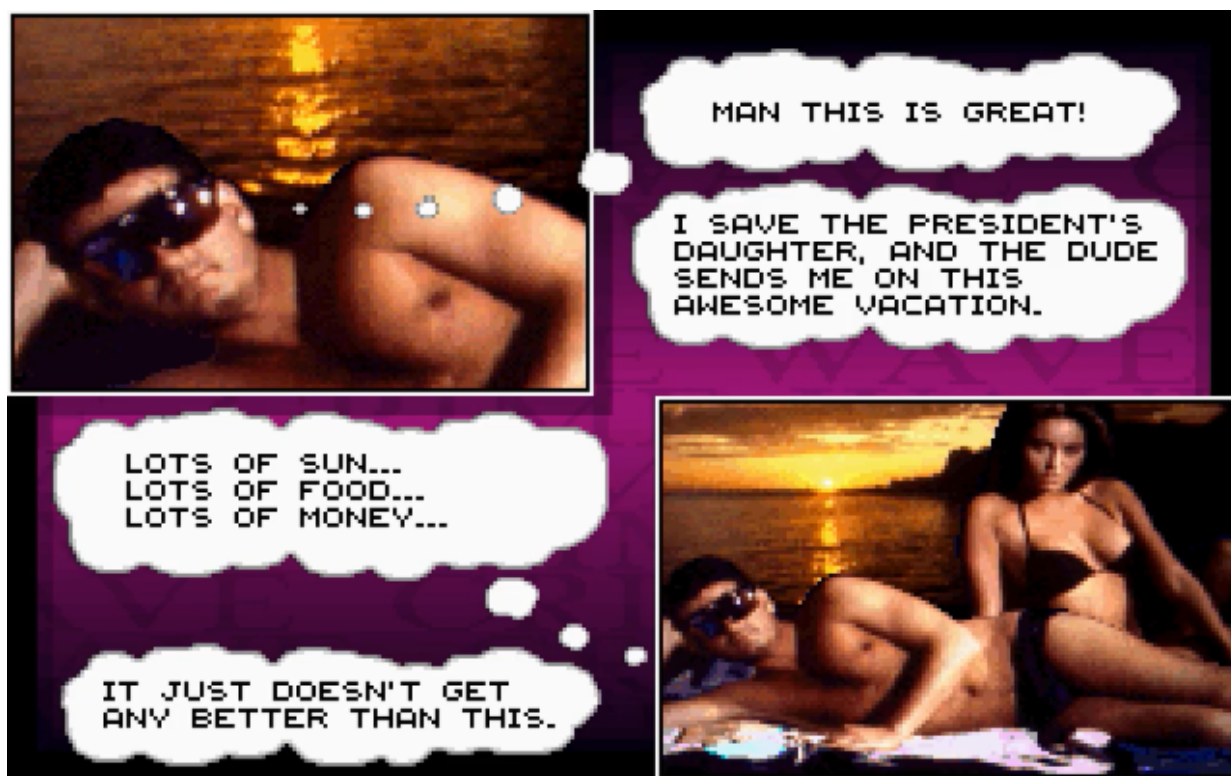
Kill-counter now off the scale and smoking, you track down Brittany to King Pin's mansion - No! Really? - where the final encounter involves duking it out with Ming's android adviser, Octon. You know, the giant mechanical octopus from Defenders of the Earth?



Octon (and carbon-copy mini-mes) lying helplessly broken on their backs (well, if the developers had plumped for persistent corpses, which they *didn't*), your reward for returning Brittany in one piece is a beach holiday in Hawaii.

Just as you ponder how lucky you are and the unlikely chances of life becoming any more perfect, up pops the

demure Brittany herself from her covert repose behind you to prove you wrong.



It's lucky this is the final curtain. One more heavily processed Kraft slice and I fear my brain's cheese tolerance receptors may have imploded under the strain, sparking a revival of Mr Creosote's after-dinner mint scene from Monty Python's Flying Circus. Which would at least be an appropriate throwback for such an unapologetically gore-splattered video nasty from yesteryear.

A "dull in the extreme... bog-standard blast 'em up with knobs on" Amiga Power concluded. The knobs being the "video interludes". It's a British phrase. Never-mind.

With music nicked from Pink Floyd, game design courtesy of Eugene Jarvis and a box cover lazily re-purposed from Mean Streets, Access didn't just concoct a *fictional* Crime Wave, they lived it, rode it and reaped the ill-gotten rewards.

In a flight of quid pro quo, Access 'borrowed' the face of Hollywood A-lister and Bladerunner star, Harrison Ford, to decorate Mean Street's US cover.

Guilty! I hereby sentence you to a lifetime of mocking by snarky retro-gamers. Take 'em down!

...You'll have to insert your own 'gavel on sound block' audio effects, sorry.